

HOT TOPICS FOR MUSIC LIBRARIANS: SESSION HIGHLIGHTS FROM CAML 2011

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The Canadian Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres 2011 conference in Sackville, New Brunswick, covered a variety of topics in the areas of music librarianship. Issues ranged from music cataloguing, collection development policies, 19th-century Canadian sheet music, and information literacy to “hot topics” for music librarians.

The session “Hot Topics for Music Librarians” was chaired by Brian McMillan, who compiled a set of questions that were sent to him via email by other music librarians. Open discussion of these topics and questions allowed for all attendees to participate and to contribute to the conversation.

The following are highlights and observations from the “Hot Topics for Music Librarians” session.

Question #1

I have a question I would like some feedback on ... Not working with the students/researchers that you would see in an academic library, I am curious as to how these users look for classical material. Specifically, do they ever use the name-titles that are provided on the cataloguing record? It seems to me that keyword searching would be used almost exclusively now when searching the databases, but I really don't know.

The first issue that was brought forward was the use of name fields and whether or not they provide a simplified way to find music materials. It was acknowledged that names present certain problems when there are multiple spellings used for a particular composer. It was generally agreed that the best approach is to teach library patrons to search with keywords and then adopt the use of the name field once more specific information is pulled from a keyword search. That is, once the standardized forms of an author's name and a title are found through a simple keyword search the patron can move to more advanced searching, which includes using the name field.

The use of uniform titles in online catalogue records and the question of how to teach music library patrons to use them was also addressed in the same fashion as using the name field when searching. It was agreed that it is best to identify uniform titles through keyword searching if the exact title is not known or if a title search under uniform title retrieves no results.

There was further discussion about creating a more advanced system that could utilize cross references in a more transparent way, making searching easier and more accessible for library patrons. Name fields and uniform titles are still extremely useful, but it might be best to show patrons how to use these fields through a basic keyword search and to teach them how these fields function in the OPAC.

Question #2

Unionization: I would like to ask whether or not being in a union makes anyone feel safer, given the storm created by the statements (and actions) of the Chief Librarian at McMaster, Jeff Trzeciak.

A topic prevalent not only in music libraries, but across all academic libraries, is unionization versus faculty associations. The conversation was fueled by concern over the statements and actions of Jeff Trzeciak at McMaster University. This brought about the question of whether librarians feel safer with a union rather than a faculty association. Some librarians in nonunionized environments said they feel safe and still have the same opportunities as those in unionized libraries. There was some disagreement, though, as some librarians in unionized environments felt that they had more opportunity to do research and be better represented within the university. It was difficult to compare unionized libraries to libraries with faculty associations, since faculty associations can vary so much from institution to institution.

There was some agreement that unionization is preferable when it comes to tough times within a library or academic institution. In this case unionization provides job protection and stronger support. Overall, it was stressed that librarians have to promote themselves and show that they are a vital part of running a functional library.

Question #3

There is a very hot topic that has been sitting on my back burner for a while now, namely, the acquisition of mp3s for the library collection. Increasingly I'm finding that the purchases I'd like to make are limited by the fact that we have no technical infrastructure or legal framework to support developing a collection with mp3s. We have access to pretty well all of the online streaming packages (Naxos, Alexander Street Press, etc) and I'm sure that eventually the "big three" will have some sort of deal for libraries (or will they?), but there are a host of independent labels now selling mp3s exclusively. And we have no means to collect their material.

The acquisition of mp3s in libraries poses a large problem due to the multitude of various individual licenses, many of which allow only for private use. Many vendors are only releasing and selling music as a download and not providing a physical format anymore. This creates some major issues for libraries because most companies will not allow music to be copied onto a CD or iPod for library patrons to listen to. Companies don't seem to realize that they are creating this problem for libraries, so there is uncertainty if this problem will be solved by the vendors themselves. Librarians need to start negotiating for better licensing and more flexible copyright. There is especially a need to address the accessibility of Canadian content and to make sure that this is available to library patrons. Even though better licensing and copyright laws would assist with this issue, there is still the problem of tracking down individual artists or copyright owners to ask for permission.

Another issue is how libraries store and archive these materials. Currently, libraries are ill-equipped to store and archive music in mp3 format.

Question #4

How are music libraries dealing with print-on-demand scores? Any issues?

Scores are increasingly being made available digitally, to be sent to libraries in electronic format or to be printed for a specific library. A number of sources for digital scores were mentioned, including vendors (e.g. Schirmer's Print-on-Demand service, American Composers Alliance pdf download service) and free sites (e.g. IMSLP, Sibley Music Library Digital Scores Collection). Sibley was also mentioned as a source for out-of-print Carl Fischer publications. The subscription database *Schubertline* was cited as a valuable source of public domain scores that can be freely printed – even in transposed versions – as the need arises.

As with audio formats, licensing issues related to scores can also pose challenges for library collections, as some self-published works are now being licensed for specific uses only.

Question #5

We are in the midst of a new building program for the Faculty of Music (and the music library). One "hot topic" that keeps coming back to me is ... what is the future of listening stations in music libraries? We are looking 3-4 years down the road and it's hard to know what to plan for, other than FLEXIBILITY.

It is difficult to predict the future of listening stations, considering the ongoing changes to music formats and to the ways that we listen to music. Most music library listening stations currently have a mix of upper-end CD players and a few turntables. The use of listening rooms has gone down considerably since the introduction of music recording databases, portable media players, and laptops. Many students seem to prefer to listen on their laptops or iPods, in part because there is the opportunity to listen to music in a group and discuss what they are hearing.

It was recommended that listening stations maintain Blu-ray players, since many laptops do not have this feature, as well as turntables. There was also discussion on providing more portable playback devices, such as iPods and iPads. Another idea was to have a soundproof study space that could be used for group listening or for conductors wanting to practice without the wires of headphones. Planning for the development of a new listening area should include a survey asking what students want in terms of a listening room or station. Ensuring that there are plenty of outlets for electronic devices and providing stations with multiple headphone outlets for group listening is essential.